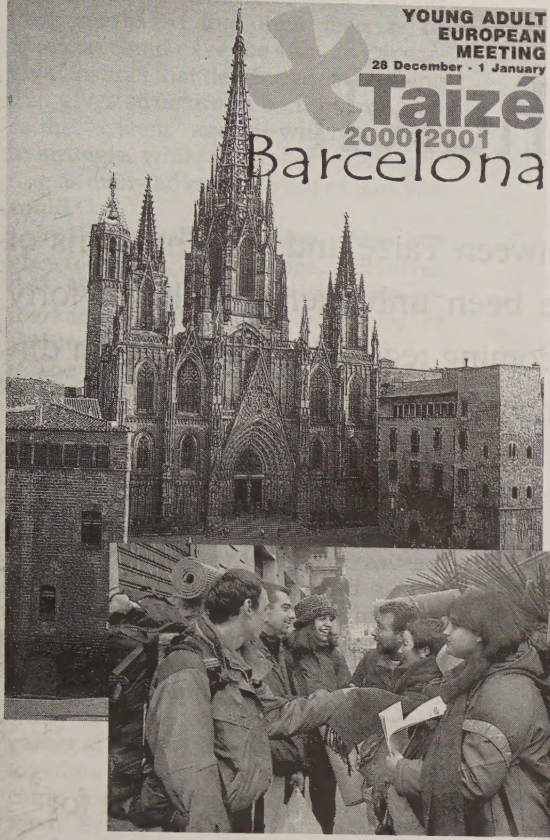




YOUNG ADULT
EUROPEAN
MEETING
28 December - 1 January

Taizé
2000/2001
Barcelona

Letter from Taizé

August - September 2000 Bimonthly 3.50 FF 4

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THE NEXT YOUNG ADULT EUROPEAN MEETING
FROM 28 DECEMBER TO 1 JANUARY

Barcelona Is Getting Ready to Welcome the Youth of Europe

An image typical of Catalonia comes to mind as a way of describing the preliminary work of making the first contacts: the human towers that people traditionally build during the popular feast-days. From afar all you see is the wonderful balance of those who climb up but, at the base, at least a hundred people have built a solid foundation through ties that have been patiently created.

Preparations for the European meeting have been made easier as a result of the experience of the two previous meetings held in Barcelona. This makes it possible to reflect on the meaning of the meeting rather than to focus on the practical questions, which can be dealt with when the time comes:

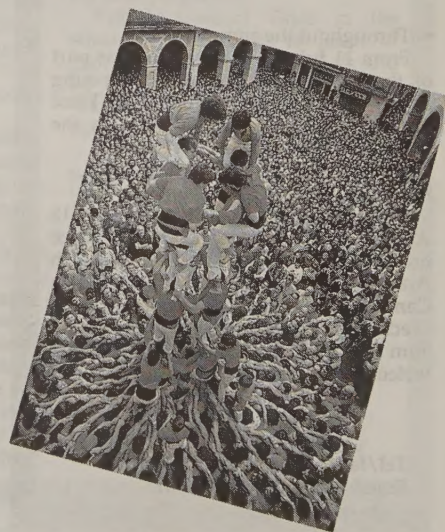
"We have already hosted two European meetings. After so many years, we can ask ourselves what has remained. One important thing was the discovery of the value of silence and prayer. This is something that is often missing in our parish life. We have understood that prayer can be a springboard for commitment, in particular with the poor. For more than twenty years, a service has been held every Sunday in the Chapel of Hope, in the heart of the Gothic district of the old city. It is attended by the young and the not-so-young, by those who come regularly and some who come once in a while, and there are even those who return after several years.

Naturally the team that organizes it has changed a number of times, but this place of faithfulness has remained. This long and simple meditative prayer was a starting-point for some; for others it has been a support for their involvement in a parish or movement."

Many young Catalans from Barcelona are eagerly looking forward to the presence of young people from throughout Spain who will help them with the welcome: "In Barcelona, we are counting on young people from other parts of Spain. That is one of the unforgettable memories of the previous meetings: the richness of the sharing between the peoples of Spain, the complicity, the joy of getting to know one another better. We feel that we need to open our doors in all directions."

A young priest from Barcelona writes: "Our local Church has recently lived through an important event—a regional council which has brought the eight Catalan dioceses together for three years. Asking the question 'Why have so many people left the life of the Church?' this council asked everyone involved in pastoral work to 'enter into contact with those who are far away, through actions and a language able to communicate God's tenderness and love.' What more can we wish for than to give the sign of our open doors and our welcoming homes? In this way we will respond to another invitation made

by the council: to share 'a lifestyle which is simple, in solidarity with others, with a positive vision of our people, involving a contagious joy, generosity, commitment and participation in associations and in political life, and freedom with respect to the new idols in the life of society.' Seeing around us so many young people who have never known anything but addiction to consumer goods, I am happy that the European meeting will be an experience of friendship, openness, and in-depth discovery, of which they will be protagonists or at least witnesses."



The Witness of a Church Being Reborn

Contacts between Taizé and the Christians of Russia have been unbroken for almost forty years now. For the last ten years, groups have been coming regularly to Taizé from different parts of Russia, sometimes even from very far away, from Siberia.

Recently two brothers of the community spent two weeks mainly in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. This allowed them better to understand the context in which Christians are attempting to live out a hope.

The waves of people who returned to the Church in droves at the beginning of the 1990s is over. Although the percentage of those regularly practicing their faith remains small, on the same scale as in Western Europe, growth and dynamism are strong and the significance of the current renewal is immense. The politicians who place themselves alongside the bishops are not mistaken. Ever since the mayor of the capital committed himself to the reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, every local leader has been supporting the building of a church, if possible in the center of the city. In the spiritual vacuum and the identity crisis which is deeply affecting Russian society today, the Church is a precious support. It offers comfort in the trials of life, nourishes hope, provides beauty, and invites



people to find meaning in life beyond the difficulties which each day brings.

A time of builders

This is a time of builders, and of parish priests who are big businessmen. The rebirth of the Church is taking place above all in the parishes. They are not divided geographically; rather, communities are formed by people of similar outlook, often around a priest or a reconstruction project. As soon as the walls, the domes and the bell-tower are restored, a place of prayer exists and, in just a few short years or months, magnificent frescoes and iconostases replace the first images pasted on cardboard. The liturgy is rich and demanding. All the traditional rites, processions and blessings are being rediscovered with no complexes. But near each church you also find a kitchen and a dining room where the core of the community gathers after each service: the priest, the deacon, the servers, the choir, the maintenance team, the workers and artisans, those who run the bookstore, take charge of religious education, show hospitality to the poor, and so on.

Churches and chapels are opening in military bases, hospitals, cemeteries, universities and prisons. And this dynamism can be seen in other areas: monasteries, training institutes (this year the Saint Tikhon Institute has 7000 students undergoing training), schools, libraries, publications and pilgrimages.

In the towns, beggars sit at the door of churches as well as in railway and

underground stations. Some parishes organize a meal for the homeless twice a week. A group of volunteers sets up trestles right in the church and welcomes these "new poor." Everywhere you can see signs of the zeal of a small group of committed persons who serve and build, beautify or collect funds and support so that the Church can come to life again.

An immense thirst for trust, recognition and kindness that goes hand-in-hand with the general identity crisis

"Who are we? Where have we come from? Where are we going?" These constant concerns of humanity remain especially strong in a society where some people have to struggle with all their strength simply in order to survive. The past remains painful and hard to digest on a personal level. Because of the complexity of the situation, the future is still uncertain. Many see their country as a hospital patient just coming out of a coma. No doctor dares to give a prognosis; even the illness is unknown.

This thirst for trust, for recognition, for being regarded with kindness lies beneath the questions that come up at each meeting: "What has changed since the last time you were here three years ago? What have you seen in your travels? Is it true that people abroad are afraid of us?"

Rebuilding from the bottom up

The Soviet regime wanted to impose communism by an egalitarian ideology, by uniformity. The use of violence and fear, and the destruction of the religious and national patrimony had the opposite effect: society was split apart into

Taizé in Rome During the Year 2000

▪ Throughout the summer

From 11 July to 19 September, as part of the *typical week* prepared for young adults, there is a prayer with Taizé brothers every Tuesday at 7pm in the Chiesa del Gesù (Piazza del Gesù).

▪ During World Youth Day

From Wednesday 16 to Friday 18 August: prayer and welcome by Taizé brothers at the Church Santa Maria in Aracoeli on the Capitol Hill (Piazza Campidoglio 4, Piazza Venezia): prayers Wednesday and Thursday at noon, 3pm, 5pm and 8pm; Friday at noon and 3pm; welcome throughout the day.

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tiny fragments. Individuals hid behind thick masks so that their feelings or opinions could never be seen. In the survival instinct that developed, everything that gives structure to society was seen as the "system" against which you had to struggle, while at the same time getting as many advantages out of it as you could.

In the general landscape which has grown out of this heritage, initiatives that recreate the social tissue are remarkable. Here are two examples of youth groups.

The members of a parish youth group in a small town two hours away from Moscow by train explained to us, "*Perestroika* wanted to transform things from the top down, but it is obvious that nothing really changed. We have to begin from the bottom up. We have to go to meet the young people where they are. Once a week we visit the schools to meet students and to tell them about the life of our group of young Christians. We come together every Sunday evening to share and to reflect. Those who study in Moscow during the week gather at another time to pray and to eat together. Some help with a summer camp for handicapped children in our town. Even if the Church will always be a small number of people, we have to be open to the others. We have to look for communal holiness rather than an individual holiness."

We were told that we should visit Durakovo. No road leads there: we ended our journey on foot after having driven for several kilometers over open fields. The village is located on the side of a cheerful valley, at the bottom of which winds a stream that feeds ponds. The hills are blanketed with woods. For six years, a no-nonsense businessman from Moscow has been committing all his savings to a rehabilitation center for ex-alcoholics. Some thirty young people, between twenty and thirty years old, are using the best materials to build a whole village that seems to come out of a fairy tale. Animals and people inhabit it. Horses, rabbits, pigs, goats, geese, donkeys, chickens...this Noah's ark has a saving function for the young people who are taking care of it.



Preparation

For the meeting to go well means that everyone takes part in all its different aspects; it means paying attention to others, being open towards people from other countries. In many countries, prayer gatherings will start in September, to enable people from the same region to prepare together.

Some questions to help prepare for Barcelona:

- What motivates me to set out towards other Christians who are far away?
- The pilgrimage to Barcelona calls for an inner attitude of openness and attentiveness to others. How can I begin by opening myself to those who need me here and now?
- Can I take an occasional time of silence to review my life, to pray simply while listening to God, and to see what consequences there are in my daily life?
- Do I know others who would be keen to join in this "pilgrimage of trust" as a way of discovering a deeper community in the Church?
- The starting-point of the pilgrimage is the local community. How can I look for ways of maintaining and deepening links with different groups and local Christian communities?

Practical Details

Arrival: Thursday morning, 28th December 2000 between 7am and 12 noon.

Departure: Monday afternoon (after 4pm), 1st January 2001.

Accommodation: either with families or in school and church halls. It is essential to bring a camping mat, sleeping bag and warm clothes.

General programme for 17-29 year olds

Participants will be welcomed by families and local church communities throughout the city and surrounding region. Morning prayer each day will be in one of the churches of the neighbourhood where you are staying. Afterwards, meetings in small groups with other

participants and with local people. At midday and evening each day there will be prayers for all participants of the meeting together. In the afternoon, workshops on various themes. It is also possible to spend the five days of the meeting in silence (separate accommodation).

Helpers/Choir: (This option is open only to young adults between the ages of 17 and 29.) Those who would like to help as group-leaders in parishes or team-leaders for practical tasks, or in the choir group, should, if possible, arrive on Tuesday 26th December, between 8am and 3pm. (It is not possible to arrive on 27th December). Some of these teams will also be open to participants who arrive on 28th December.

16 year olds: may come to the meeting only if accompanied by an adult over 21, with each adult accompanying no more than six 16 year olds. Arrival: 28th December (not before).

Adults over 30: The European Meeting is intended for young adults under 30. However a few adults over this age can also come, in particular if they are leading groups of young adults. We ask older adults (over 45) to consider sponsoring a young person to come from a church, chaplaincy or school in their area, instead of coming themselves. All adults over 30 participate in the main group, and arrive on 28th December (not before). If you cannot accept the same simple accommodation conditions as the young people and need a "real bed", please indicate this when you register.

Families with children, and people with a disability: who need special accommodation should contact Taizé — best by telephone in October or November — to arrange this.

Contribution to costs: The level of contribution for young people from Ireland and Britain will be approximately £40 for the whole meeting (the exact amount will be known in October). For other countries, please contact Taizé. As well as the cost of hiring meeting-halls and equipment, this covers all meals and a public transport pass for each participant.

Travel: Contact Taizé in the summer or autumn to learn of groups being arranged by air and by coach. From the UK: contact "Skyliners", (02476) 325682; taizebookings@skyliners.co.uk

Registration for the meeting: with Taizé by 1st December. Further information will be sent in November to those who register earlier.

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"Where sin proliferated, grace was always greater" (Romans 5,20). These words of Saint Paul sum up the Good News of which he was the spokesman: as a result of the coming of Christ Jesus, no barrier can ever again separate human beings from communion in God. Love has triumphed once and for all over all obstacles. "There is no condemnation any more for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8,1).

And yet in three of the gospels, Jesus speaks about a "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" that will never be forgiven (Matt 12,22-32; Mark 3,22-30; Luke 11,14-23 and 12,10). This passage has at times fostered uncertainty, and even anxiety, in some people: could I have done something that places me once and for all outside of God's love?

These words of Jesus were directed against those who accused him of having healed a possessed man by power that came from the spirit of evil. Jesus replied in effect to this grotesque accusation, "It might even be comprehensible if, in spite of everything, you do not recognize in me the One sent from God, for I have come in the form of a humble servant. But to see the act of healing, something so characteristic of the God of life, of God's Spirit, as the work of the Evil One... for that you have no excuse."

"Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" is thus not an act which, once we have committed it, would subject us to a definitive condemnation. It consists rather in an obstinate refusal to recognize and to welcome God's forgiveness, transmitted to us by his Love in person, the Holy Spirit. Expressed in a positive manner, these words emphasize how deeply God respects us; God never forces our freedom. Even among human beings, love cannot impose itself; it must be freely accepted in order to transform the life of the person who is loved. In similar fashion, God offers his love freely to everyone, but he cannot dispense us from collaborating with this love by an act of our free will, by what the Bible calls conversion of heart.

The fact that a human being can refuse to accept God's forgiveness does not mean, however, that God takes back his love. In the cross of Christ, we have definitive proof of the contrary: we discover a God who never turns back but who gives himself to the very end. Christ is the Good Shepherd, who ceaselessly looks for ways of bringing the strayed sheep back to the fold. He comes down into our personal hells in order to break open the gates and take us by the hand, pulling us out, as we see in the icon of the Resurrection. Faith in the resurrection is the source of a foolhardy confidence that life and love will have the last word in every person, even the one who seems to be furthest away. As a result, we can and must have hope for all.

"God loved us first" (1 John 4,19; cf. 4,10). If a certain human logic persists in seeing forgiveness as the result of recognizing the sins we have committed and resolving to do better in the future, this cannot hold true on the level of faith. "God showed his love for us in this way: Christ died for us while we were still sinners" (Rom 5,8). In consequence, must we refuse to allow repentance any role to play in the Christian universe?

We must not forget that God's love, like all love and perhaps to an even greater degree, creates a relationship. It is the offer of a communion. And if this communion is authentic, it will of necessity transform the life of the person who accepts it. In the New Testament, this transformation bears the name of *metanoia*, a word often translated by "conversion" or "repentance" but which literally means "a change of outlook." It refers to the radical reorientation of priorities which accompanies an encounter with the living God.

Metanoia is essentially a positive reality. It involves our entry into a new life, an existence for God and for others. After his encounter with Jesus, a chief tax-collector stated, "Lord, I am going to give half my goods to the poor and, if I have wronged anyone, I will give him or her back four times as much" (Luke 19,8). He said this *after* Jesus had shown how much he cared for him, not as a way of earning Jesus' esteem. *Metanoia* possesses another dimension, however; it implies an awareness of the evil that we have done and that is now forgiven, which shows indirectly how strong and deep God's love is. It is this second dimension which can more properly be called repentance.

The acknowledgement of evil is not simply accusing ourselves of wrongdoing. Nowadays, in large part because of the widespread dissemination of psychology, we are more aware that our faults are conditioned by the wounds we have received. It is therefore harder for us to determine and to localize guilt, which as a result becomes more diffuse. How can we know clearly where personal responsibility begins and where unconscious tendencies end? In our life with God, though, that is not what matters most. The important thing is confessing to what extent God's forgiveness exercises a liberating function in our existence. God entered my life, he saw everything in me down to the very depths, he did not turn his face away but showed me how much he loved me. As a result, I can face my faults and limits in my turn, without needing to hide or justify them. Because of my encounter with the unconditional love of God, I can accept myself to a greater extent just as I am—a being who is constantly in need of God. Rather than engaging in interminable breast-beating or trying to draw up rigorous accounts, I proclaim with the man healed by Jesus, "I only know one thing—I was blind and now I see!" (John 9,25).

SEPTEMBER

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

3 SUN It was God's choice to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all his creation.

4 Mon The days are coming, says the Lord, when I shall send hunger upon the land; not hunger for food or thirst for water, but a hunger to hear the Word of God.

5 Tue Jesus said: If you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with them first, and then come back and present your offering.

6 Wed Let no one seek their own interest, but rather the good of others. Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

7 Thu Paul writes: I did not come among you with eloquence or wise arguments to announce the mystery of God. I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ crucified, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

8 Fri An angel said to Joseph: Mary will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

9 Sat You are light in the Lord. Live as children of light; for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.

10 SUN Jesus took the man who was deaf and could hardly speak aside, away from the crowd. With a deep sigh, Jesus said "Ephphatha!", that is, "Be opened". At this, the man's ears were opened, and he spoke clearly.

11 Mon Joseph forgave his brothers saying: Do not be afraid; it is I, for me to put myself in God's place? The harm you planned to do me has, by God's design, been turned to good.

12 Tue Of Christ, John writes: The light shines in the darkness, and darkness could not overpower it.

13 Wed God will guide his people in joy, with the mercy and saving justice that come from him.

14 Thu Jesus said to his disciples: Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom.

15 Fri You have become light in the Lord. Live as children of the light.

16 Sat Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice! The Lord is near.

17 SUN Jesus taught his disciples: The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously and to be rejected by the chief priests and scribes, to be put to death, and after three days to rise again.

18 Mon Daniel said: May God be blessed for ever and ever. The Lord reveals depths and mysteries, and light dwells with him.

19 Tue You are eagerly waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will continue to give you strength to the very end.

20 Wed Pray in the Spirit at all times. Never tire of praying for all God's people.

21 Thu St MATTHEW Jesus said: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Indeed, I have not come to call the just, but sinners.

22 Fri Jesus said to the tempter: It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

23 Sat The Lord says: Come back to me with all your heart. Come back to the Lord your God who is tender and compassionate, and rich in faithful love.

24 SUN Jesus said: Whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.

25 Mon St. Paul writes: Though there seemed to be no hope, Abraham hoped and believed, being fully convinced that God is able to do what he has promised.

26 Tue As gold is tested in a furnace, God purifies those who love him. Those who are faithful to him will dwell with him in love.

27 Wed John the Baptist came as the prophet Isaiah had said: A voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight."

28 Thu Trick the cares that weigh upon you, console your heart, chase sorrow far away, for sorrow is no use to anyone.

29 Fri God says: Love the foreigners among you as you love yourselves.

30 Sat Joyfully you will draw water from the springs of salvation, and you will say, "Praise God and call on his name. Proclaim God's deeds to the nations!"

1 SUN Mk 9:38-48 Jesus said: If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, then in truth I tell you, they will certainly not lose their reward.

2 Mon Lm 3:54-57 You came near when I called you, Lord, and you said, "Do not be afraid."

3 Tue Lk 6:17-23 Jesus said: Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

4 Wed Is 54:10 God says: Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, my faithful love for you will not be shaken.

5 Thu Ep 2:19-22 You are part of God's household. You are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone.

6 Fri Mt 7:12 Jesus said: Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

7 Sat 1 Co 10:12-13 God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength. But when you are tempted, God will give you the means to stand up to it and will show you a way forward.

8 SUN Mk 10:2-16 Jesus said: In truth I tell you, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

9 Mon Is 46:3-5,9 The Lord says to his people: I have carried you since you were conceived. Until your old age I shall be the same, I shall sustain and save you.

10 Tue Jn 5:24-27 Jesus said: Whoever listens to my words and believes in the one who sent me has passed from death to life.

11 Wed Mt 6:19-21 Jesus said: Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too.

12 Thu 1 Th 5:12-22 See that people do not pay back evil for evil, but always seek what is good, both among yourselves and for others.

13 Fri Jn 9:1-41 Jesus said to his disciples: We must do the work of the one who sent me, while the daylight lasts. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

14 Sat Lk 6:27-35 Jesus said: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

15 SUN Mk 10:17-30 Jesus said: No one who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age, together with persecutions, and, in the age to come, eternal life.

16 Mon Is 49:1-6 Isaiah said: I thought my struggle had been futile, that I had worn myself out for nothing. Yet all the while my cause was with the Lord and my reward with my God.

17 Tue 1 Co 3:18-23 Paul writes: All things are yours; but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.

18 Wed Lk 10:1-9 St LUKE Jesus said: The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. So pray that the Lord of the harvest may send out workers into his harvest.

19 Thu Ph 2:1-11 Paul writes: Be one in love, one in heart and one in mind; do nothing out of jealousy or vanity.

20 Fri Rm 13:11-14 Paul writes: Let us put aside the deeds of darkness. Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

21 Sat Lk 5:29-32 Jesus said: It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.

22 SUN Mk 10:42-45 Jesus said to his disciples: You know that in the world rulers lord it over their subjects and make their power felt. This is not to happen among you. No, anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant.

23 Mon Rm 11:29,33-36 Paul writes: God never revokes his gifts or his call.

24 Tue Si 4:1-10 Deliver the oppressed from the hands of the oppressor and you will be like a child of the Most High who will love you more than your own mother does.

25 Wed Jn 11:1-45 Jesus said: I am the resurrection. Whoever believes in me shall live, even though they die. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

26 Thu Is 40:25-28 The Lord says: Why do you complain, my people, saying, "My way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is disregarded by God"? Do you not know? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the world, who does not tire or grow weary.

27 Fri 1 Tm 4:12-16 Paul writes to Timothy: You have in you a spiritual gift which was given to you. Do not neglect it.

28 Sat Mt 19:27-29 Jesus said: Anyone who leaves everything for my sake will receive much more and will inherit eternal life.

29 SUN Mk 10:46-52 Jesus asked a blind man, "What do you want me to do for you?" "Rabbi, I want to see," he replied. And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has saved you."

30 Mon Heb 10:22-25 Let us hold to the hope we profess, without wavering, for God who has promised is faithful.

31 Tue Jn 12:20-30 Jesus said: In truth, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains only a single grain. But if it dies, it yields a big harvest.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

Towards the end of the ministry of the prophet Zephaniah, there is no longer any king or Temple in Jerusalem. The joyful celebrations and the pilgrimages are only a distant memory. If people still think about them, it is with sadness and regret. War, famine and exile have almost wiped out God's people. Very little is left of its former glory. But now, for this "remnant of Israel," the prophet has an astonishing message: "Rejoice!" "Shout for joy!" "Exult with all your heart!" He cannot find enough words to proclaim to them the message of happiness.

Fear is a great obstacle to joy—fear of the tragic consequences of the errors of the past, agonizing worry about the future. To open a space where joy can develop, the Lord combats the causes of fear. He "turns the enemy away." He "repeals the sentence"; he makes sure that our faults do not lead to misfortune. His forgiveness reactivates "limp hands." It is true that Jerusalem no longer has a king, no organized life. Everything must begin anew. But why be discouraged if God himself comes as "king of Israel," the one who takes care of his people?

It is as if Zephaniah saw the Lord coming. God comes like a young man in love, singing and dancing. "He rejoices with happy song," "he dances with shouts of joy because of you." God lets his people glimpse that in the depths of his being he is joy. "God finds joy in his creatures" (Psalm 104,31). His love is joyful, and for that reason it is always new, always surprising. "The Kingdom of God," says the apostle Paul, "is joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14,17). The Holy Spirit brings together two joys—God's joy and our joy. One calls out to the other; one leads the other as in a dance, in the festival where God and human beings are united.

- How can we leave some room for the spirit of celebration in our daily lives?
- Where, at what moment, on what occasions, can I feel joy being reborn in me?
- What are the obstacles to joy that I would like God to remove?

"A God who is near": this expression sums up Israel's experience of God's tenderness. God watches over his people, "protects them, rears them, guards them as the pupil of his eye" (Deut 32,10). But God's people also experienced a "God who is far away," and Jeremiah complains about this: "Why have you become like a foreigner in the land?" (Jer 14,8). It is as if God no longer intervened in human affairs; his presence could be felt no longer. He let Jerusalem and its Temple fall into ruin. "I call and you do not answer" (Psalm 22,2). Even those who believe must live as if there were no God.

At that time, some prophets kept on making promises in God's name in order to shore up the morale of the nation. But in reality they were inventing them. They felt obliged to fill the vacuum left by the absence of any concrete experience of God. Jeremiah suffered from God's silence too, but he did not want to pretend. He consented to live with his questions. And one day he received an answer: God is not only "a God who is near" but also "a God who is far away." He is not only found in the experience of fullness, but also in that of lack, of longing. There is no need to fill the vacuum caused by the impression that God is far away, for God "fills heaven and earth" at all times.

The experience of a "God who is far away" gave Jeremiah a deeper understanding of God's love: "God appeared to me from afar: I have loved you with an everlasting love" (31,3). If God seems to hide his face, that is to let us discover a love beyond anything we can imagine. If God "flees like the deer" (Saint John of the Cross) and seems far away, that is in order to help us, in our turn, to keep going far along the way of the Gospel.

- How do I react when God seems far away, or even absent?
- To what experiences in my life do the expressions "a God who is near" and "a God who is far away" correspond?
- What helps our love for God to grow?

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

IN MEXICO, DAYS OF PRAYER AND SHARING

New Roads for the Younger Generations

More than 1000 young Mexicans, coming from sixteen states and all the regions of the country, came together from May 18-21 in the town of Querétaro for days of prayer and sharing with Taizé brothers, in collaboration with the youth ministry commission of the Mexican bishops' conference (CEMPAJ).

This meeting marked an important stage in the relationship between the Taizé Community and the Church in Mexico, the fruit of a friendship going back more than twenty-five years.

Already during the 1970s several meetings of young people took place in Mexico, and a number of young Mexicans came to the hill of Taizé. Bonds created at that time have still remained strong today. For ten years now, the CEMPAJ has been sending to Taizé young Mexicans who are active in the life of the Church and are involved in peer ministry. A hundred young Mexicans have thus spent three months in Taizé taking part in the intercontinental meetings there. One of the first of them was José Luis:

"That experience in 1990 changed my life. I was always committed in the Church, but my stay in Taizé together with young people from so many different parts of the world gave me a much larger vision. It was the discovery of one God reflected in thousands of different faces. When I returned to Mexico, I worked in youth ministry and in social action, through a movement called 'Young People in Action.' Then I got involved in the political life of my country, and since 1997 I have been a member of Parliament while still teaching in a Jesuit university. In Taizé I learnt one of the most important things for my life—the words 'living beyond every hope.' That's the way I would like to live my entire life."

Ten years later, young people still have similar experiences when they come to Taizé for three months and then make commitments on their return to their country. Many of these young women and men came to Querétaro, and their presence made a difference in the preparation and the course of the meeting. Cristina comes from Durango, where she is studying law:

"In 1999, I was in Taizé for three months. Already during a preparation meeting we had in Toluca before leaving, I was struck most of all by the prayer, so deep and so peaceful. The meeting was like many others we have had, and yet something was different: the quality of the listening and the life together impressed me. When I got to Taizé,

it was even more powerful. Being together with young adults from throughout the world taught me a lot. Everywhere there are people who suffer, who have problems, not just in the poorer countries. If we remain together, we can look for solutions. The important thing is to keep trust alive.

"Taizé helped me to realize that praying does not just mean asking God for things, but above all expressing our trust to God. When we express this trust in prayer and by sharing our lives with others, our faith grows stronger, and when we ourselves are filled we need to share with others what we have received. My experience in Taizé remains at the root of my work in youth ministry."

Last year, when two brothers visited Mexico, in reflecting with the CEMPAJ the idea came up of holding a national meeting to mark the jubilee year, to pray together, to go together to the wellsprings of the faith and to be creators of reconciliation. Rogelio, a young layman who works with the CEMPAJ, explained why this meeting seemed to be so necessary:

"There are many different kinds of spirituality in our groups and youth movements. Each group has its own style and often does not know that there are other ways of being Church. This meeting can open us up to a more universal dimension, as well as responding to a need to deepen and interiorize our faith. The aspect of sharing our lives, of being welcomed in families, is already quite normal for young Mexicans. But prayer with meditative singing and a long period of silence, as well as Bible introductions that try to express something very simple and essential and help us to relate the Gospel to our lives, are things that are very new for us."

Querétaro is a medium-sized city, two or three hours by bus from the capital. A colonial town with a beautiful historical center containing impressive Baroque churches, it played an important role in the history of Mexico. In the last century, the movement for the country's independence began there. The young people in charge of the diocesan youth ministry were confident that they could easily find families to offer hospitality to an indefinite number of participants coming from other places, and this turned out to be the case. The local exhibition center, normally used for exhibitions of farm animals or for cockfights, accepted without hesitation to host the meeting. An association of women in one of the parishes agreed to prepare the meals. Though the Mexican style of organization is somewhat different from that of the Northern countries, the imagination and inventive abilities of the people evoked unbounded admiration, and in the end everything became easy.

For many of the participants, the greatest discovery was undoubtedly the prayer. Some were afraid that the meditative style of the worship, with long periods of silence and repetitive songs, would be too new and unfamiliar for the Mexicans. But from the very first evening, the times of prayer together three times a day were the backbone of the gathering. Well before the start of each service, the participants filled the vast empty hall, turned into a beautiful place of prayer thanks to the creativity of the preparation team.

Although prayer was at the heart of the meeting, a concern to link faith to the reality of the society was equally present, something important in a land where poverty and injustice are so deeply a part of people's day-to-day life. Maria Elena, a psychology student who had spent time in Taizé, expressed it this way: "For me, the prayer in

IN SWEDEN, FROM 2-5 NOVEMBER 2000

A Meeting in Uppsala

At the invitation of the Council of Churches of Uppsala, some brothers from Taizé are organizing a meeting of young Scandinavians in that city to be held from 2-5 November 2000.

The first groups of participants have already registered, not just from all the regions of Sweden, but also from other Scandinavian and Northern countries. Some young people from the Baltic countries and from Russia will come as well, crossing the Baltic Sea by boat, with those from Finland. In Uppsala, some twenty-five places of hospitality are being organized in parishes of different denominations.

"It will not be easy to ask families to open their homes," said one young man. "In Sweden we are not used to welcoming people we do not know into our homes. Finding places to stay for all those who come to the meeting in November will force us to come up with different possibilities in our parishes. We will only find these places in families if we dare to go out towards the others who live in the district, and if we work together with all the different church groups."

A pastor commented, "I like the idea that

many different kinds of young people will come to meet in my church. Every week 14000 persons enter our parish house to take part in different activities and groups, but they never meet all together, and most of them do not come to Sunday worship in the church. This meeting in November will be an opportunity for us to learn to do something together."

The Swedes themselves say that Sweden is probably one of the most secularized countries in Europe. But there are also signs that things are changing. "The atmosphere has changed," a boy explained. "A few years ago it was difficult to talk about faith and the Church in public. Now many people are beginning to ask questions about inner life, and they speak about it openly. The topic of God is no longer taboo. And certainly the presence of thousands of young adults in this great historic cathedral of Uppsala will reveal this spiritual thirst that is awakening."

Taizé helped me and still helps me to deal with the concrete realities of my life. This meeting in Querétaro can now be for many young people a beginning that moves their hearts. It will help us discover a faith that is not detached from the reality around us, something personal."

Each morning, bible introductions given by the brothers and based on the Letter *Astonished by Joy* led to a time of sharing in small groups that were formed spontaneously. These groups based their reflection on questions such as "What actions or initiatives express our desire to build a world in the image of the Beatitudes?... In what situations of opposition and incomprehension is it urgent to bring reconciliation and understanding?" Friday and Saturday afternoon, local and national testimonies made concrete and accessible hope in a world in the image of the Beatitudes. Among other speakers you could hear a religious sister tell of her work with abandoned and abused children, a former drug addict talk about his return to life thanks to his friends from the parish, married couples explain how to incarnate the Gospel in family life, and young adults describe experiences of mission in isolated native villages.

During the final celebration, a message was read from Brother Roger which summed up well the meaning of the days together in Querétaro: "Many young Mexicans possess Gospel gifts—a trusting heart, trust in the living God. Many of them are attentive to others, in particular to the poorest of the poor. They know that prayer, far from leading to passivity, commits us to take on responsibilities to build the human family, and to do this with deep personal selflessness. And so, I am very confident that in Mexico new ways forward will open for the younger generations."

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